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**Everything Ends by Coinciding**

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# **Everything Ends by Coinciding**

**by**

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## **Report**

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## **Abstract**

### **Everything Ends by Coinciding**

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When somebody we love gives us a gift, it becomes a shared skin. We can move in this skin—we can touch and feel our loved one through a common surface. Whether it be object, clothing, or a note, the potency of our beloved’s imprint fills a once empty slate with meaning. Everything has the potential to become this shared third skin—something I can touch to generate a deeper understanding of my longings.

My work questions underlying power dynamics within language and seeks to frustrate common assumptions about reality. I use poetic imagery to disrupt our static conceptions of language. This poetic action challenges our assumed conceptual structure. Using ideas gathered from object theater, the language of film, and linguistic inquiry, I create dreamlike situations that utilize sound, text, and image reconstruction to form nonlinear narratives.



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## UNDOING TO REDO

When I point to an orange I can have it represent the world. Objects inherently hold expansive meaning—and I can play with that meaning.

Kara Keeling, in her essay "Looking for M—" states, "Future poetry remains a viable formulation of what is required to effect a radical break with the past—a rupture from within history that also breaks from history."<sup>1</sup> *Future poetry* is a way of interacting with language that shifts expected relationships within inherited structures of communication. When one speaks poetically, they reorient notions of expression to a more open breathing within language. It inches individuals towards the language of dreams and possibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Kara Keeling, "Looking for M—".

## THE BREATH OF POETIC LANGUAGE

I had a vision one day of feeding a tree poems and so I did. The action was straightforward. I sat on my knees next to a squat, spindling tree. A stack of poems laid beside me and from my hand rose a long stick. The mouth of my stick punctured the paper, attaching body to body. With the stick as an extension of my arm, I raised the punctured paper as an offering to the tree. Problem being, the wind was strong and the sheets of paper floated away shortly after being placed. I watched from the ground as the poem's body pushed through the maze of branches and waved off into the distance. This is an action of complete hope and hopelessness merging as one. This is poetic action—an action that has no practical purpose but exemplifies a desire to move with the incongruities of the world and its multitudes. I touch the world in a different way when I move outside of usual habits. Often, we float into engrained formulas of interaction becoming only distantly aware of our bodies movements during daily tasks. If you willingly shift habit, a potent sense of presence infiltrates consciousness. Poetic action is a form of performance, and it is also active meditation—listening to the world and its subtle voices. I become an active sculptor of my environment and rediscover how my body flows through it. Life is constantly resurrected, just as a bird eats a seed, digests, drops it out, it sprouts, and we consume the fruit once more. I constantly resurrect myself. I plant seeds of unknown dimensions. “The tree of life, and the tree of life...”<sup>2</sup>

When we feel a tree, it is also feeling us. Our language can reflect that knowing. Our bodies exist within an interwoven mesh of being—animate and inanimate worlds hold the same vibrational life energy inherent within our quantum makeup. Through poetic action, I inhabit a perpetual state of potentiality and usher viewers into this space. I show that there is reciprocity to all objects, and I can dilate the possibilities of the body. I can drip through a keyhole, a body can melt, or an egg can have predilections for how it wishes to be held. This linguistic metamorphosis cross pollinates language of the animate and inanimate worlds. Poetry creates a synesthesia of action and as I close my eyes, I feel my body drip and in that way I am kindred to a faucet. I can allow the word “lick” to be applied to rain touching my body. I let the rain lick me

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<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Plath, “The Munich Mannequins,” 4.

and a reciprocity of touch opens up. For we, as humans, evolved in conversation with the earth and then a world of objects evolved around us—an interwoven mesh of being.

Knowing this, my body opens up into a physical matrix full of potential collaborators. I can psychically imbibe an object as if it is my first encounter. And isn't it? I stare at a doorknob and think, *doorknob will be with me in most rooms until I leave my body. I can see myself in its form. Doorknob allows me to move in and out of spaces.* I have the same echo of a feeling looking into doorknob as I do gazing into a dog's eye. There is a rubbing between the disparity of our consciousnesses—absence and presence make themselves known.<sup>3</sup> We better know ourselves in this exchange. “In a field, I am the absence of the field.”<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the dog feels this. Perhaps the doorknob feels it. I feel it, at least and the doorknob becomes an eye and a reflection of myself. I long to know these bodies, and so I give them a voice.

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<sup>3</sup> John Berger, *Why Look at Animals*.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Strand, “Keeping Things Whole,” 1-3.

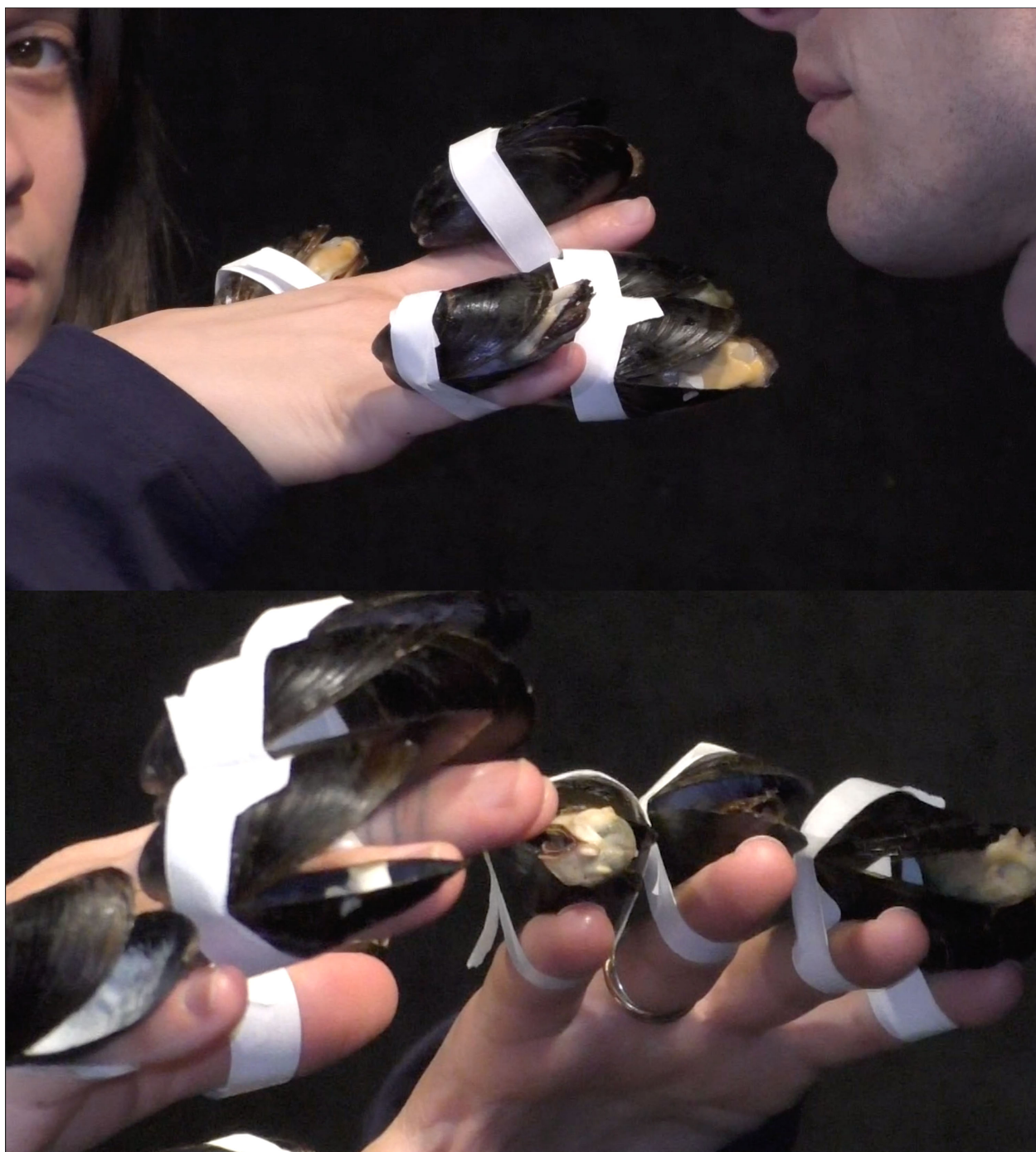


Figure 1: *Blue Book*, Performance-still, 2019

## WORN OUT HEAD TAPES

Within our interwoven mesh of being, everything is inherently linked by those who use language through linguistic conventions and societal agreements. Clothes are for wearing. A fish is for eating. A picket sign is used for protesting. There is “the universalized image-repertoire...making a world without difference of reference, of perception.”<sup>5</sup> This standardized image-repertoire is loosened within the arena of dreams—an alligator can come out of your mother’s ear or your father does not look like your father but you intuitively *know* it is your father. Once, a field of pineapples grew from my splayed belly button as I floated in a blanket of stars.

My poetic actions spring from this image-repertoire of dreams. In this way, I loosen assumptions about objects and their place within the world. Playwright Richard Foreman explains, “I seek to demagnetize impulse from objects it becomes attached to.”<sup>6</sup> I interview a deceased loved one’s shirts to discuss its dreams and if the pile of shirts misses having body.<sup>7</sup> I duct tape a fish to my arm and pour beer down its gullet, imagining it can breathe again.<sup>8</sup> I have a crowd of people swim in a lake holding blank protest signs.<sup>9</sup> Poetic action is a way of *pointing to* our impulses and associations. I point to the structure of your image repertoire by not adhering to its specificities. In *pointing to*, I draw attention to the vast disparity between our definitions of things. As an incongruous pit opens between us, I offer a guided tour, walking side by side along the newly formed rift. “Every moment it opens new unheard-of pathways. Over here! Over there! See my multiple bodies...”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Foreman, *Unbalancing Acts*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> The shirt has a voice!

<sup>8</sup> I breathe life back into the dead!

<sup>9</sup> Idea of sign!

<sup>10</sup> Federico Garcia Lorca, “The Garden,” 5-8.

Acting against assumption sparks confusion. Confusion ultimately clarifies by acting as a catalyst to break down repetitive or limiting perceptions. Where you notice difference, you linger. I cross contaminate disparate parts of your image-repertoire by using my body and the performative frame (video or image) as a ground for experimentation. “Open up [my] hand... isn’t there an ashtray, suddenly there?”<sup>11</sup>

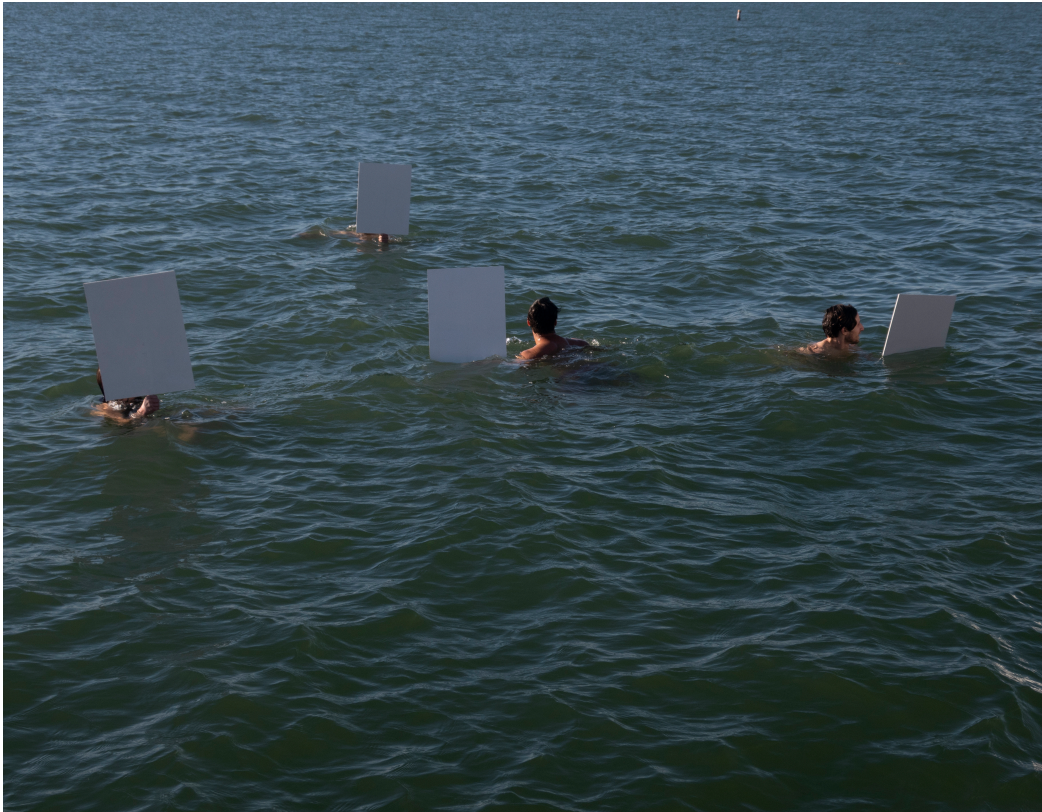


Figure 2: *everything ends by coinciding*, Performance-still, 2020.

Within performance, objects used in tandem with the body form new compositions of seeing. A hand with mussels lining its fingertips (Figure 1) confuses an expected image-repertoire. In intertwining these two objects of high complexity together, I give viewers a confused feeling to sift through. Perhaps you think, *hands are beautifully complicated body extensions*. Then you think, *mussels are magnificent vessels of time and repetition*. And you think even more—*when mussels and hand are together they make me feel as though I want to simultaneously be touched by this hand whilst I am also severely repulsed by this hand*. The hand plays with the mussel, and

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<sup>11</sup> Frank O’Hara, “For Grace, After a Party,” 10-12.



the mussel echoes its newfound voice off of the hand. This call and response between body and object creates new growth in the visual-expressive repertoire. The new hand has its own voice, now able to communicate a confusion or feeling. It has a voice, and I amplify its voice through my actions.

The performance lineage of Object Theater heavily influenced the manner in which I tie objects together. Looking to Stuart Sherman's "Spectacle" performances, I noticed he constructs, dismantles, and reconstructs relationships between objects to form new semiotics. His performances operate through an expansive symbolic system outside of conventional information relaying or habit—he is not a performer, but a conductor and a maker of worlds. Sherman's actions are worldless and often wordless. Objects are fed new identities in their rapid collision with one another. He performs with a sense of urgency, allowing very little time between object collisions and one flows into the other. You often end up where you began, but standing from a varying vantage point. Associations between concurrent object collisions wordlessly weave themselves together, moving to form oblique meanings. Disparate objects become alchemically bonded through the contact and guidance of Sherman's hands, body, and fragmented utterances moving in unison.

I resist culling a singular meaning from Sherman's performance or from my own. Like Sherman, I bring systems and groups of images together, but there is no point—only *pointing to*. Life is not a linear narrative, but one is coaxed into thinking it is—to think in past, present, and future. In reality, there are multiple realms of time constantly flowing through our "present." Richard Foreman explains, "We feel our lives as a series of multidirectional impulses and collisions."<sup>12</sup> The past extends into the future and the future psychically influences the present. At any given moment, threads from many psychic sources are being woven together by hands floating through multiple realms of time. "In Kyoto, hearing the cuckoo, I long for Kyoto."<sup>13</sup> Our language can reflect this knowing.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Foreman, *Unbalancing Acts*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Basho, "In Kyoto..."

<sup>14</sup> Bodily and spoken.

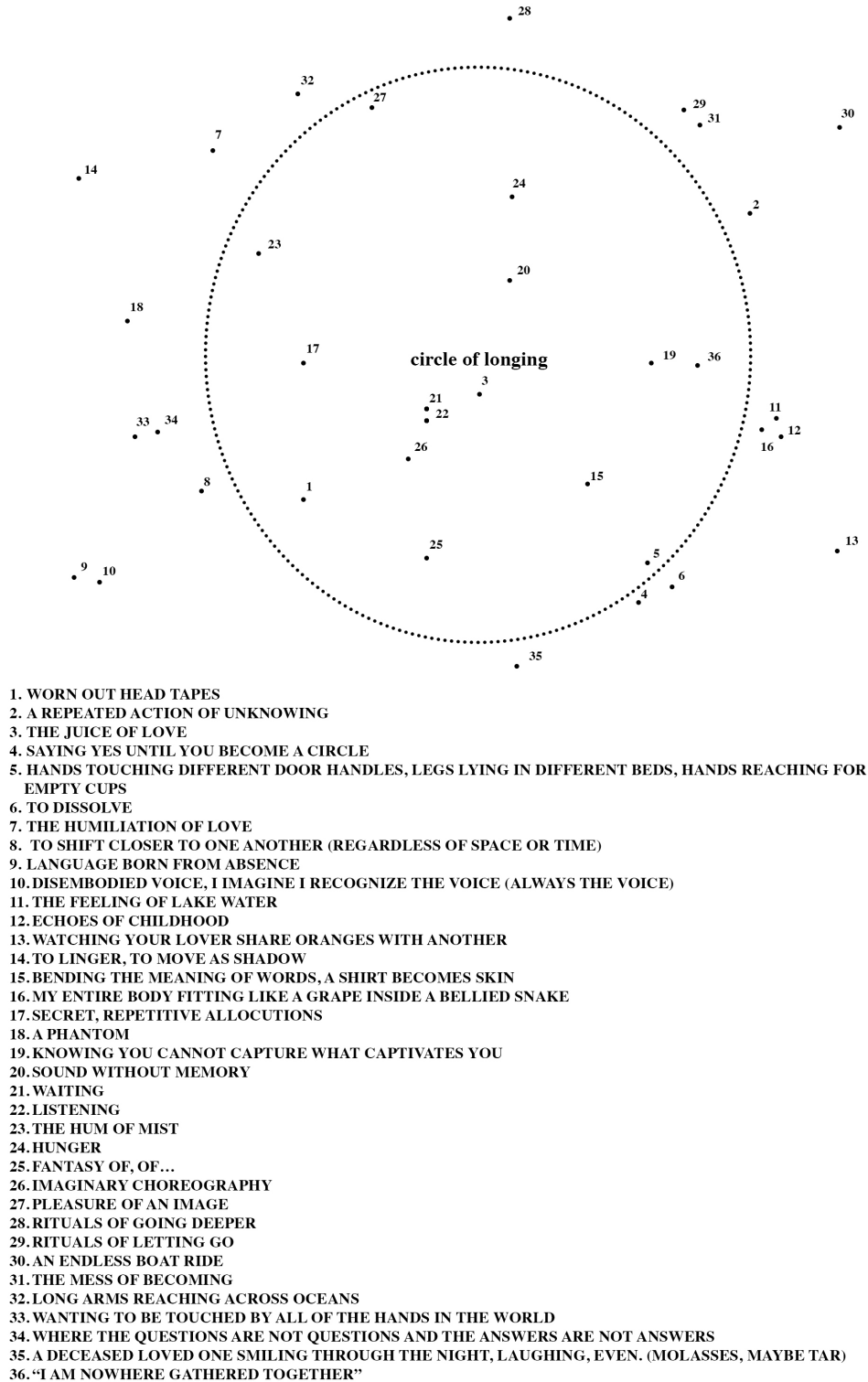


Figure 3: *circle of longing*, Digital map, 2019.

## THE ROMANCE OF SEEKING

As I collect fragments of poetic language, certain periods produce certain image-repertoires. Collections naturally coalesce into specific motifs, actions, and loops of thought. The nature of fragments mirrors our mental world—not often do we swim in fluid sentences, but rather in a collision of short, nonsensical phrases we sift through to speak coherently. Mimicking the inherent discontinuous nature of time, fragments shown together present bits of pastpresentfuture bumping and collapsing in on itself. The structure of fragments invokes absence, hinting at a before and after that is not visible, but lingers.

The writings within any given body of work are echoes in a canyon—many voices looping back and through and on top of one another. I sit at the base of the canyon where certain voices stick, some overlap, and some underline one another’s phrasing. I listen. Poetry is the seed and images are its fruit it gives to fuel the body. I think of Barthes inquiring, “Does the text have a human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body?...The pleasure of the text is irreducible to physiological need...The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas.”<sup>15</sup> My physiological need is to move the text and its voices through my body as *the text chooses* to express itself as a series of images or poetic action that I carefully attune myself to receive. I become a conduit. The text acts as a catalyst for the body to discover and intuit how to move with its environment to better understand any given *void*. Every performance is an attempt to fill a void and I have a void down to the bottom of my toes.

During the past year and a half, the echoes within my canyon encircled an emotional landscape of longing—the hope and hopelessness of it. “You know what I thought? I thought heartbreaking. Now I think heartbreaking, but also insane. Also very funny.”<sup>16</sup> Figure 3 is a graphical representation seeking to understand the incomprehensible and ostensibly unknowable emotion of longing through a logical system. I map and wander through the shapeless mass that lingers round this bodily feeling. Longing is a deep, rich pit. As I moved through longing, it

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<sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Louise Glück, “Telemachus’ Detachment.”

revealed itself to be a scattered circle, constantly beginning where it ended. The language itself pointed to a pushing desire to be held or subsumed by a larger entity. Longing is nowhere gathered together. Translating this text and landscape through my body, I began to use existing architecture of nature (Figure 4) and public spaces to hold me and see if I could better understand the fragments as singular and collective sentiments. The text becomes a sculpture and calls for the body to become sculpture as well. The body becomes a relic of language's carving.



Figure 4: *to hold and to be held*, Performance-still, 2018.

Poetic action moves between reality and dream to physically work through paradox. A single motif, turned durational, is a portal to hypnotizing unreality. *Do you not understand me? Don't understand me, let me show you.* Physical action is required to make people believe in an abstracted idea. Why does poetic action matter so much to me? It is a deep relief to see possibility manifested into action—an exhale. Internally, *I recognize* this action to be closer to my reality. It is a moment of stasis, a breathing of impracticality, and a large shout towards a

voice of exploration and hope that does not exploit or maim. “Art must be like that mirror that reveals to us this face of ours.”<sup>17</sup>

Most performances I have done recently take the form of video-performance. In this way, I am able to present and edit the multitude of layers involved to create a multidirectional experience. When I begin to translate a text into a video-performance, I start with sound because the text longs to be a voice—many voices. After sound forms, I move through the physical performance itself because the voice longs to know a body. During the digital editing process, layered text moves in as either subtitle or concrete poetry.

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<sup>17</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, “*Ars Poetica*,” 19-20.

## NOWHERE GATHERED TOGETHER

Text within video-performance is a malleable source of implied voice. There is no set way it reveals meaning, but it can quicken the message. Text within video is constantly choosing whether to affirm or deny the moving image. Does it ricochet meaning *onto* or *off of* the action?<sup>18</sup> Often, this choice of the text shifts throughout the course of the performance. When text flows in agreement with image, it guides meaning so little projection is done by the viewer. It underlines itself. If the subtitle of a video says, “I am here,” and it is my body standing directly in the frame, I am there. But if I say, “I am here,” and within the frame is an orange, the text disorients by pointing to an incongruous relationship between the explained meaning (text) and the shown meaning (performance). The movement back and forth between clear and disoriented meaning causes vigilance and questioning—you are actively questioning what you *want* to believe. What reality do you see and is it as you expected? Do you want to move with or against it? I am more attracted to the incongruous relationship (Figure 5) because it stirs subtle irritation. In this resistance to direct comprehension, I mimic the flow of life and inch closer to a truer experience of my emotional and temporal landscape. How can I sit with the realization that fear and hope are two side of the same sheet of paper? It is hard to hold everything at once. Disjointed text and image pairings allow me to point at both faces of Janus at once and to also point to the moon. Richard Foreman beautifully underlines this idea:

“We abide by cultural directives that urge us: clarify each thought, each experience, so that you can cull from them their single, dominant meaning... become a responsible adult who knows what he or she thinks. But what I want to show is the opposite: how at every moment, the world presents us with a composition in which a multitude of meanings and realities are available, and you are able to swim, lucid and self-contained, in that turbulent ocean of multiplicity.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Foreman, *Unbalancing Acts*, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Foreman, *Unbalancing Acts*, 53.



Figure 5: *to talk about the end, you have to talk about the beginning*, Performance-still, 2019.

I give the viewer permission to let go of control and to soak into the environment of the action itself with multiple visual motifs and forms of text becoming the same face and voice. *Look*, love holds the same bite of hate, *look at it*—it is actually quite nice. I acknowledge that many may not grasp this feeling, and for them the performance turns into sand constantly flowing through their fingertips. But others may stay with the text, some may dance with the performance, or others may swim in the current of the two flowing together and feel the expansive confluence.

If one pleases, the text can also be its own piece within the video-performance. If you soak in *just* the text, dreamlike storyboards unfold. In a recent interview-performance with the aforementioned shirts belonging to a deceased loved one, the typed out dialogue acts as a performative score (Figure 6). The text allows for a multiplicity of digestions of the piece, all extended and offered to the viewer at once.



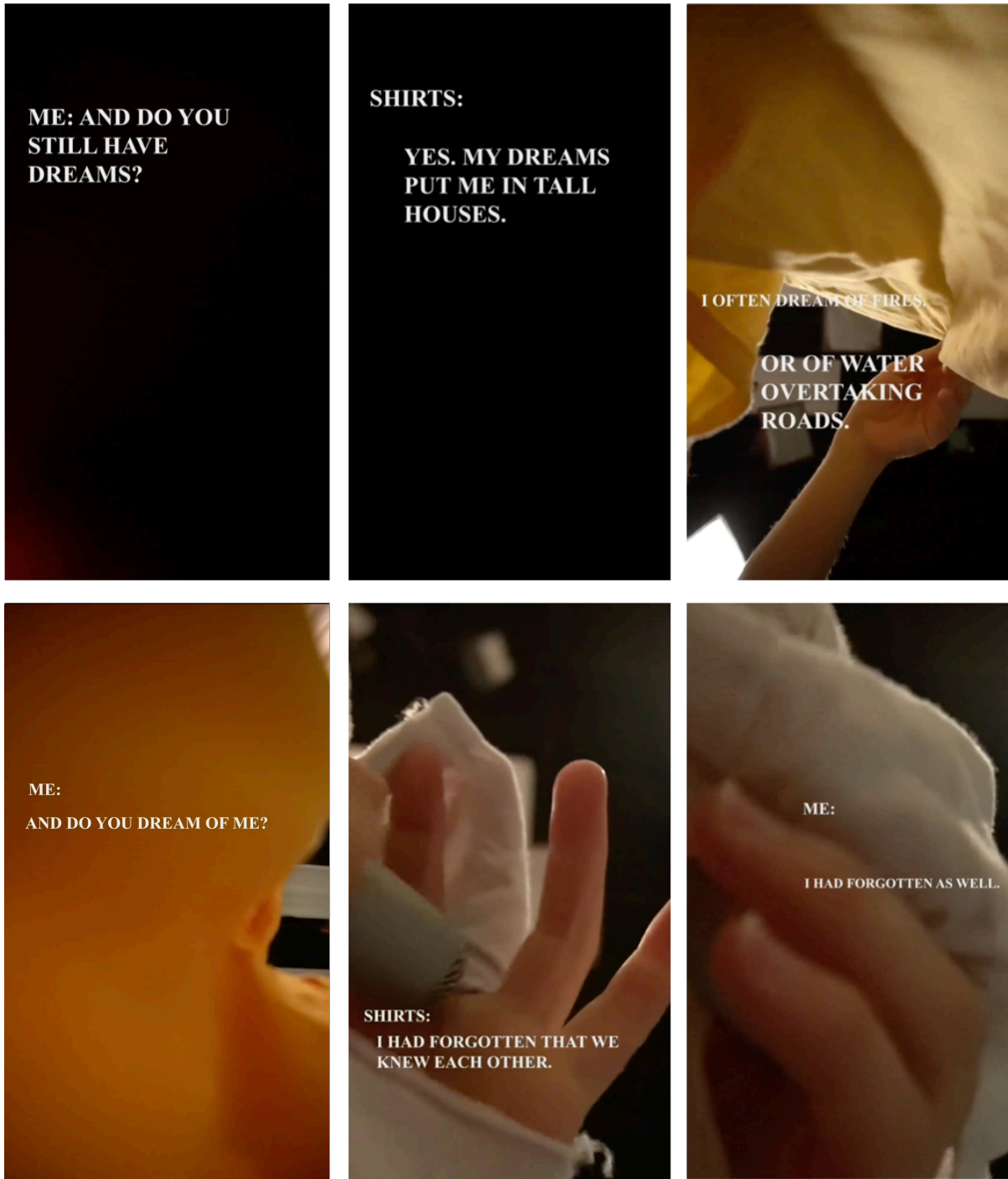


Figure 6: *an interview*, Performance-stills, 2019.

## I IMAGINE I RECOGNIZE THE VOICE (ALWAYS THE VOICE)

Within my video-performances, spoken dialogue and poetry becomes a disembodied voice. The spoken voice does not match my mouth or flow from lips, but rather hums above the surface as directional narration and layered feeling. When voice is divorced from specified action or body, it hints towards a physical presence that is not there. Much like the structure of a poetic fragment, it evokes absence. One can float with or within the disembodied voice, subliminally wondering and reaching towards the question: *where did this voice come from?* This search of origin mimics the searching that transpires when we long for something. I want to make you long to know a body you've never met by cutting you off from direct visual cueing.

The audible voice forms a concentric circle around the subtitle and they begin to dance— attracting and repelling one another. The subtitle does not replace the spoken voice, but encircles it by sometimes prodding difference, and other times aiding the flow of language around the moving images. Subtitles, being printed words, are distant and often computerlike, giving generalized interpretations of sound devoid of the nuances of tone, stress, and pacing. Subtitle is language stripped down to directional reality. In that way, it can be a tool to point to a different reality with deadpan precision. Subtitles become a projected present. They cue clarification, but when manipulated, can conflate the multiplicity of narrative voices further.

At one point within the video-performance, *to talk about the end, you have to talk about the beginning* (Figure 5), I clearly say out loud, “I’m sorry, I’ll be nicer,” but the subtitles read, “[indistinct murmuring.]” This undermining of language negates my physical speech while also underlining the futility of my emotional longing. A contradiction between sound and subtitle emerge, asking the viewer to choose which voice they align with, or seeing if perhaps they can rest somewhere between the polarities. In a way, I am indistinctly murmuring a mantric aspiration while I also sit within the realization that my longings cannot be understood by most.

When text, image, and voice move as one, together they create a durational framework that extends beyond the beginning and end of the video itself. Barthes claims that still images imitate

death but moving images intimate the continuation of soul and an energy that reaches beyond itself.<sup>20</sup> As objects, bodies, and voice move in and out of the video frame, they hint at a *continuation* ad infinitum. Their momentum as a collection of cohesive images and as a separate reality continues forward and backwards in time, becoming its own unit of (un)reality. The frame cannot hold everything at once, just as we are not able to, and therefore the frame dissolves in a sense. We stand together, illuminated in a landscape. “It is not the moon I tell you. It is these flowers, lighting the yard.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 78.

<sup>21</sup> Louise Glück, “Mock Orange,” (1-3).

## THE WORLD AS A SHARED SKIN

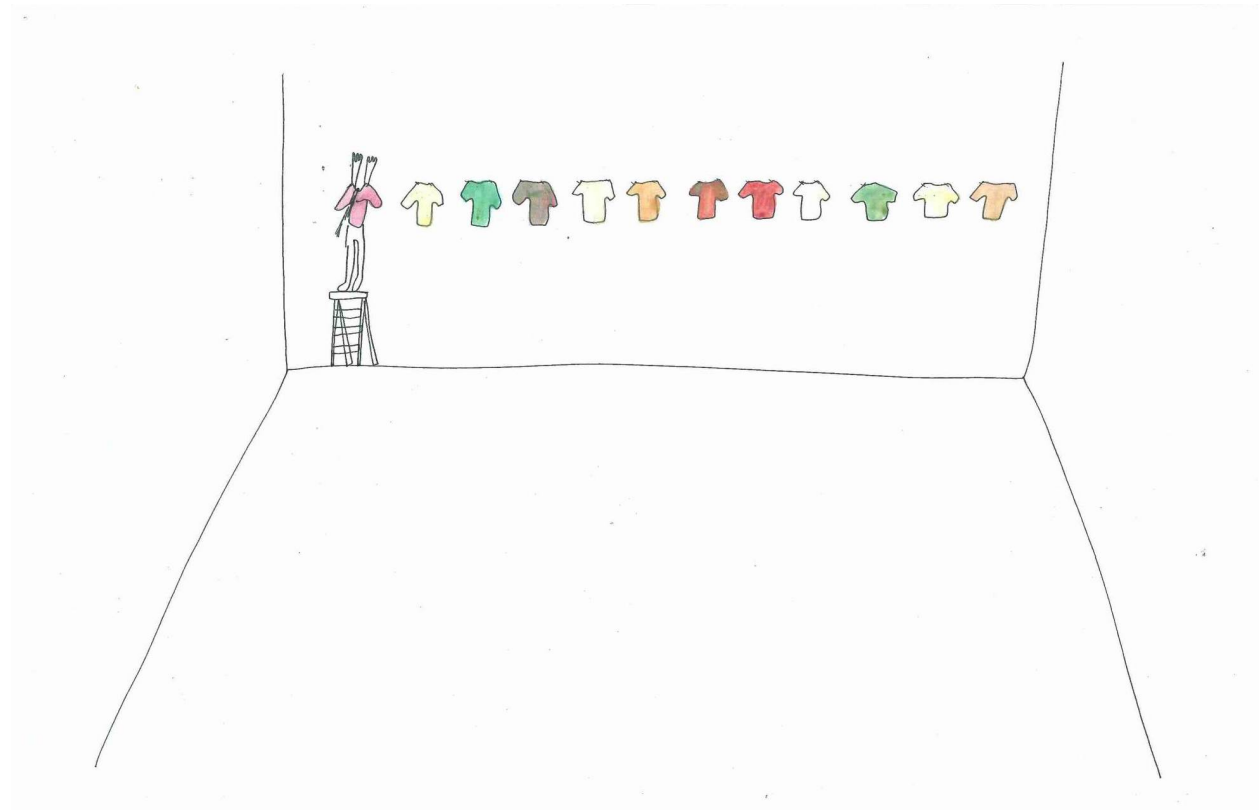


Figure 7: *to better know a body*, Performance-sketch with ink and gouache, 2018.

The cultural mythology I currently find myself within is spiritually and psychically draining. It is a dysfunctional mythology that opposes curious rhythms of expression and blindly stifles the contradictory nature of the self.<sup>22</sup> But, if one is able to presently stand within the multitude of voices that swim and loop around and within us, there is an opportunity to dismantle these restrictive modes of being. This is what I am constantly attempting for my own sense of becoming and understanding as I move through and with confusion. During this process of transforming, I have found that death is a song and love is not one object of desire, but rather how you move and interact with the world. I extend my work as an offering—a pocket of stasis to try on, to move around in. Does it make the viewer feel warm in any way? Does it help? Who

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<sup>22</sup> Ram Dass, “Changing Cultural Myths.”

knows? *What* knows? To return to Richard Foreman, “I am interested in giving free play to the part of the self that weaves whole worlds out of whatever it finds in order to discover, through ever more eccentric constructions, what the self might indeed be.”<sup>23</sup>

Recently and long ago, a man in Italy asked me where I was from, and I pointed to the moon for lack of a common tongue or ability to express or explain that I felt like I was from nowhere. I could have pointed to anything. I was in Venice, and I could have pointed to the overflowing gutter, but I pointed to the moon because it has the death mask of the rabbit within it, and, like the rabbit, my death mask floats in the sky every night.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Foreman, “Unbalancing Acts,” 82.

<sup>24</sup> Referencing the Moon Rabbit legend from the Buddhist Jataka tales.

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